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a Better Future Now

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Opinion

The Future of Sexual & Reproductive Health Care Begins with Listening to Black Women

Repairing historic harm begins with trust — because we know that when Black women thrive, we all thrive.

In honor of Black History Month, Planned Parenthood Columbia Willamette (PPCW) is committed to centering health equity for Black women.

PPCW comes to this work humbly, fully recognizing that Black women’s health experiences and pain are too often dismissed or ignored by health care providers, which can contribute to staggering and avoidable health outcomes. Today, maternal mortality rates for Black women are 2 to 3 times higher than rates for their white and Latina counterparts. We are working to be a crucial health care partner in reducing these statistics by ensuring that our patients are informed so they can make the best health decisions for themselves.

In my 22 years at the Salem health center, I am proud to work with an incredible team



Angele Kirk
Planned Parenthood Columbia Willamette

that focuses on creating a more equitable health care future — one patient visit at a time. Recently, I received a note from a Salem patient that said this:

“Wow, I came in very stressed and concerned about some symptoms, but the lovely staff and top-notch care really put me at ease. I felt very cared for, received a reduced payment because of my income, which was also really supportive, and just generally had a great experience with not-so-great reasons for coming in. That says a lot that the staff turned it around! So grateful for this resource that is Planned Parenthood, thanks for being here.”

This is the experience we strive to provide at Planned

Parenthood. Every day, clinicians and staff work hard to provide welcoming, trustworthy health care spaces, where providers take the time to understand without judgment what circumstances bring a patient to a visit and how best to provide quality care.

“The lovely staff and top-notch care really put me at ease

As the largest nonprofit of sexual and reproductive health care and education programs in Oregon and SW Washington, PPCW recognizes the role that we play in supporting Black patients’ access to health care, which is why we have expanded several programs in the past few years:

- We have hired four patient navigators to help our highest-need patients navigate

getting the abortion and gender-affirming care resources they need most.

- There are funding resources that can help people pay for visits, with or without insurance and regardless of immigration status.
- And we honor the resilience and importance of Black women’s lives by working closely with grassroots, POC-led partner organizations to support health care and education goals within our communities.

Building equitable health care entails listening to Black women. We know that if we center the patients whose experiences and pain have been too often dismissed and ignored, we can be a part of building a better health care future — for everyone.

Angele Kirk is the Salem Health Center Manager for Planned Parenthood Columbia Willamette. She studied sociology at Western Oregon University and lives with her husband and teenage daughter near Salem.

The Biden-Harris Administration’s LNG Decision is the Hope Young People Have Been Waiting For

James Hiatt lives in an area along the Mississippi River in Louisiana that has been dubbed “Cancer Alley.” Teeming with chemical plants and oil and gas refineries, the air the residents of this area breathe contains more carcinogens than anywhere else in the country.

One of those oil and gas facilities is the Calcasieu Pass liquified natural gas (LNG) terminal, which has further devastated public health, local livelihoods, and marine wildlife. Last week the Biden-Harris administration’s Department of Energy (DOE) paused the permitting of new LNG projects. The decision stops the gas industry’s plans for the even larger CP2 LNG terminal right next store.

This move was perhaps the boldest rebuke ever from a US president against the oil and gas industry. President Biden, Vice President Harris, and Secretary of Energy Granholm — whose support for the move was especially crucial — did the right thing.

Millions of us are celebrating along with James Hiatt, who says, “I’m thankful for this pause in granting gas export licenses; the DOE has finally heard the wake-up call. The gas industry was planning to inundate my hometown with LNG terminals.”



Ben Jealous
Guest Columnist

American families’ pocketbooks will be thankful as well. Any word you hear from the fossil fuel industry or the politicians in their pockets about how this decision harms

“For years, activists, along with scientists and others, have been sounding the alarm

American consumers or the economy is a lie.

As Hiatt points out, “exporting LNG drives up domestic energy costs, affecting everything from home heating to food prices.”

Pausing the LNG boom will keep global energy markets more stable. It will help move economies and electric grids towards using less expensive and more resilient renewable

energy sources. It will keep 681 coal plants worth — or 548 million gasoline-powered cars worth — of planet-warming greenhouse gasses out of our atmosphere each year.

All of this is critically important. But so is James Hiatt’s point about the “finally heard wake-up call.”

For years, activists, along with scientists and others, have been sounding the alarm to get those in power to wake up. Some of the most powerful voices have been those of young people. And we should all appreciate what it has taken for those young people to maintain their determination.

The American Psychological Association defines “eco-anxiety” as “a chronic fear of environmental doom.” In 2021, Lancet Planetary Health surveyed more than 10,000 young people, ages 16 to 25, in 10 countries. Anxiety about climate change impacted the ability of more than 45 percent of these young people to function in their daily lives; 75 percent were “frightened” of the future. And it exposed a key feature of eco-anxiety: hopelessness.

Half the young people in the study described feeling helpless and powerless. Now, we know that despite the fear, young activists have been

among our fiercest leaders in the fight against the climate crisis. They have not given in to the lingering despair. But, as a piece on eco-anxiety in the Harvard Political Review pointed out, young people have felt like they are alone in the fight. And, “if no one is listening and no change is happening, then pushing forward can feel hopeless.”

That is why, aside from the emissions numbers ... aside from the economic and energy security benefits ... the Biden-Harris administration’s LNG decision is a win for hope. And hope is a powerful thing.

In his statement about the decision, President Biden said, “We will heed the calls of young people and frontline communities who are using their voices to demand action from those with the power to act.”

This victory for climate-concerned people the world over — and the planet itself — is proof that organizing works. Grabbing the bullhorn and telling your story — even if the crowds don’t listen right at first — matters.

This LNG decision is a momentum builder. And a clarion call for even more organized action on the climate crisis — especially from young people.